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ABSTRACT

Three projects have been undertaken in Minnesota to define standards for student outcomes in postsecondary institutions. The Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board has focused on outcomes, standards, and criteria which may be used as templates for student assessment. The first project followed the publication of the State Department of Education's "Some Essential Learning Outcomes." After the Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board found inconsistent statewide definitions of college level skills, a task force was formed to develop standards for reading, writing, and mathematics. These standards have been disseminated in Minnesota high schools and colleges. The development of standards for biology and the social sciences has been recommended, as well as the development of diagnostic tests to be administered to high school juniors. The second project was the development of standards for the associate degree. A task force developed principles, definitions, outcomes, and outcome measures. The definition of bachelor's degree standards is also planned. The third task force project is the development of expected outcomes of teacher education programs. The outcomes address three educational areas: a broad liberal arts education, the teacher education curriculum, and pedagogy linked to the particular subject being taught. (GDC)

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June 12, 1986

Kathleen M. Kies

Minnesotans share the belief that education should represent the addition of value for an individual. The Minnesota approach to realizing that belief has been to begin with deriving a consensus on definition of standards, that is, undertaking some conceptual and design work about what outcomes ought to be.

Some individual institutions in Minnesota have begun assessment programs. Bemidji State, for example, is participating in evaluation of the ACT COMP, while the University of Minnesota has been working on a writing assessment program within the College of Liberal Arts and has taken leadership in working with a group of large research institutions on developing a method for assessing writing.

The Higher Education Coordinating Board approaches the issue statewide by working with and through post-secondary systems. There are four major systems of post-secondary education in Minnesota. The Board has spoken on outcomes, standards and criteria in a series of projects. Those can be used as templates for assessment. The Board is not trying to develop tests or assessments; it is instead focusing on the criterion issue.

The three projects described briefly herein are built from the basis of the notion that if one is to measure added value, one needs to know what is present before anything is added. The Minnesota Department of Education, for the last eight years, has developed and published a series called "Some Essential

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Learning Outcomes." This work has set some standards, some essential outcomes for secondary education. Do all high school graduates in Minnesota meet those essential learning outcomes? Probably not.

Thus, beginning at the postsecondary entry level, a Coordinating Board-sponsored task force undertook to define college level skills. It is evident that there are many assumptions regarding the meaning of the term "college level." But a Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board study completed in 1984 found that the definition of "college level" and therefore of "remedial" is extremely uneven throughout the state; different institutions regarded different offerings as remedial.

The Task Force on Defining College Level Skills embodied the important linkage between secondary and post-secondary educators. It was composed of secondary teachers, staff from the Minnesota Department of Education and representatives of Minnesota post-secondary institutions. David Longanecker, executive director of the Coordinating Board, solicited "sensitive and stellar academics" to work on this project. The people who worked on the task force were certainly stars in their fields, and certainly sensitive to students. They came to some very substantial agreements about what work could be considered college level.

Standards were clarified in three subject areas: reading, writing and mathematics. The criteria for college level reading, writing, and mathematics represent fairly high standards. They have been published and distributed to high schools and colleges throughout Minnesota in order to do several things. One is to send a clear message to the high schools about expectations. The recommendations were also made to the various system governing boards in Minnesota, which were asked to adopt the recommendations as standards for college level work. The University of Minnesota has subsequently established

new preparation requirements. A student can enter the University of Minnesota, but not enter upper division work until he or she has met the standards.

The task force achieved consensus and then went on to recommend that the Board consider developing tests, particularly in the area of mathematics, as diagnostic tools to be used in high schools during the junior year. No task force has yet been convened on standards for biology or for the social sciences. Such work was also recommended, but not to be done immediately.

Meanwhile the report and the statement of standards have been in such demand that faculty and administrators are using them to create a new reality.

The second project undertaken was development of associate degree standards. This was not an effort to adopt a rising junior test; again findings demonstrated a great uneveness in the standards for associate degrees, particularly with the emergence of the Associate in Applied Science. Again work was accomplished by a task force that represented all the levels and all the kinds of people to be affected, those who know best what the standards should be. That task force was interested in stating outcomes and outcome measures, but declared that such outcomes must emerge from a clear statement about the role of general education or liberal education in each of the three types of associate degrees. They developed a set of principles and definitions for associate degrees as precursor to a statement of outcomes and outcome measures. They recommended strongly that the work which is acceptable for associate degrees be that work which was defined as college level in the previous project.

This gives Minnesota an agreement to be used in transfer of credit. It again sets very clear expectations.

The next in this series of projects is planned to be the definition of bacclaureate degree standards.

Meanwhile, on another front, a third task force is currently at work

developing a set of expectations for the outcomes of teacher education programs. It is called the Task Force on Educating Teachers for Minnesota's Future. Its charge is to perform a future scan, examine the research on effective teaching, design a desired set of knowledges and skills and understandings and recommend outcome measures. Both the outcomes of teacher education programs and outcome measures which the Minnesota Board of Teaching can use to evaluate programs are due to the Legislature by January 1, 1987.

Generally stated, beginning teachers will be expected to acquire a fairly sophisticated set of fundamental skills. The task force has defined high level verbal and thinking skills along with other performance standards. A second set of outcomes are those which can be derived from an education with both breadth and depth. If one designs such outcomes, one does not address length of program, which emerges from the ways in which results are attained. However, if one insists, as our task force has, on a broad and a deep liberal arts education thoroughly integrated with the teacher education program, one looks for measures of thorough learning and of how well both elements of education are integrated. A third knowledge area will be pedagogy linked to content and the particular skills needed for teachers of a particular body of content.

The Minnesota Board of Teaching will then develop new measures for approving programs to assure that they are results-based, and for measuring performance after the first year of teaching.

All of this work has been particularly useful as Minnesota educators focused on linkages, on breaking the barriers between secondary and post-secondary education. They are trying to develop an educational system which provides continuous progress toward one's own personal goals. For example, the passage of the Post-Secondary Enrollment Options Act allows high school juniors and seniors to take courses in post-secondary institutions. Post-secondary

institutions include area vocational technical institutes, community colleges, state universities, private colleges, and the University of Minnesota. About 2,000 students took courses in post-secondary institutions last fall for the first quarter. School personnel immediately raised serious questions about rigor, comparison of courses, and the ability to meet standards. The work on standards is doubly useful in addressing those concerns.

As the state moves toward development of improved assessment measures, Minnesotans will have been engaged in the process of creating their own standards, and will be ready for self-assessments of quality.